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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [PINR](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY GUTIERREZ MEETS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE,
DISCUSSES FTA/CASTRO

Classified By: A/POL David C. Brooks, for Reasons 1.4 (c,d)

Summary:

¶1. (C) President Uribe expressed interest in both early approval of the proposed U.S.-Colombian FTA and, barring that, in a possible extension for APTDEA. Secretary Gutierrez described how both Ecuador and Bolivia had almost certainly scotched any chance for APTDEA extension through recent actions.

¶2. (C) Uribe characterized U.S. plans for a post-Castro Cuba as "generous" and likely to reassure international observers. He went on to describe his own "respectful friendship" with Castro, whom he said had been helpful with both negotiations with the ELN guerrilla group and in dealing with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. "Fidel is the only one who influences Chavez," the Colombian President stated. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez, Ambassador Struble, DAS Walter Bastian, and Commerce Counselor Margaret Hanson-Muse met with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, Foreign Affairs Minister and Ambassador-designate to the U.S. Carolina Barco, Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism Jorge Alberto Botero and Ambassador to Peru Alvaro Pava on 7/27.

Uribe: FTA Sooner Rather than Later

¶4. (C) President Uribe and Finance Minister Botero stated that it would be better for Colombia if the proposed U.S.-Colombian FTA were introduced sooner into the U.S. Congress. Secretary Gutierrez noted that chances for passage might be better following the November elections in the U.S., when members would feel less political pressure. In response to a question about ATPDEA extension, the Secretary responded that it was not likely to happen given the current mood in Congress. Botero noted that there were still several phytosantiary measures that had to be taken by Colombian agencies, but that these should not be a problem.

¶5. (C) Both Uribe and Botero emphasized the importance of a possible extension of the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA). Secretary Gutierrez countered that this would have to be explored and that it would only be likely for countries that had negotiated FTAs with the U.S. He added that Ecuador and Bolivia, both of which also seek ATPDEA extensions, would have a hard time convincing anyone

in the Congress that their countries merited this, given the problems experienced by Occidental Petroleum in Ecuador and Bolivian President Evo Morales' verbal lashings against the U.S.

Cuba Transition Report

¶6. (C) Secretary Gutierrez then asked President Uribe about Cuba, describing the United States' Report on Transition in Cuba. Gutierrez emphasized that, despite what critics might say about the U.S. having designs on Cuba, the U.S. wants to do what it can to assure a peaceful democratic transition. The U.S. plan envisions humanitarian aid to a post-Fidel Cuba. The Secretary added that in the U.S. vision, the future Cuban leadership would come from that country and not from either Washington DC or Miami.

¶7. (C) President Uribe thought that the initiative was very positive and would have a "tranquilizing effect" in the event of a Cuba emergency. He then went on to describe his own relationship with Fidel Castro, which he said was one of "respectful friendship."

¶8. (C) President Uribe said that he had only gotten to know Castro in the last few years through official meetings. He remarked, ironically, that, "I ought to be his number one enemy." That had not turned out to be the case, however. Castro, Uribe said, had proven helpful to Colombia on two difficult issues: first, in negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and, second, in interceding with Colombia's radical neighbor Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez

on cross-border and trade issues. "Fidel is the only one who influences Chavez," the Colombian President stated.

¶9. (C) President Uribe said that he would eventually have to go visit Castro in Cuba to solicit further help with the ELN and with Venezuela. (Up until now, they have spoken by phone.) He had decided, however, to put off that visit for now at the request of Florida Governor Jeb Bush. In a similar vein, President Uribe said that he did not plan to have Colombia attend the next meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Given the NAM's positions on the U.S. and Colombia's alliance with the U.S. as part of Plan Colombia, Uribe confessed that he did not believe it was proper to participate.

¶9. (C) President Uribe closed the conversation by expressing some concern about Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who is trying to raise his profile in MERCOSUR. Uribe asked rhetorically, "Chavez' discourse hurt the Andean Community. Who knows what it will do to MERCOSUR?"
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